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SUBJECT: GUINEA CELEBRATES FIFTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

REF: CONAKRY 0512

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Republic of Guinea marked fifty years of independence on October 2 with a relatively uneventful ceremony and parade attended by seven dignitaries from neighboring countries. President Conte did not make an official appearance, sending First Lady Henriette Conte in his stead to lay the wreath at the Martyrs' Monument. Despite a build-up of public rhetoric about the event over the past year, the GoG began organizing the celebration just a few weeks ago, with many dignitaries only recently receiving a formal invitation. The event itself came off as generally disorganized with noticeably lax security given the presence of six heads of state. The Charge and the DATT attended the ceremony. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) According to a foreign diplomat, the Chinese Government provided most of the funding for the event, including the provision of 50 brand new vehicles, two large flat screen televisions, and new military uniforms.

(COMMENT. The GoG's slow progress in organizing the event was attributed in part to lack of funding, see reftel. END COMMENT).

¶3. (SBU) The presidents of Senegal, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea-Bissau attended the ceremony, as well as the vice president of Ghana. All seven dignitaries were seated on the main platform as VIPs, along with the French Ambassador and a visiting French General, and a large delegation of Chinese officials. The rest of the diplomatic community watched the ceremony from a second platform.

¶4. (SBU) Despite press reports to the contrary, the Senegalese Ambassador told the Charge that President Conte privately received the visiting dignitaries for a short time at the presidential palace after the ceremony. According to source, the president appeared "thin, but spoke to everyone, and seemed to recognize everyone."

¶5. (SBU) The diplomatic community noted an appalling lack of security throughout the event. There were a large number of gendarmes present, but they mostly appeared to be handling crowd control. The GoG offered minimal protection to visiting heads of state. When the ceremony was over, everyone left at once, leaving no opportunity for the dignitaries to depart ahead of the crowd. Several ambassadors, whose chiefs of state were attending, were visibly frustrated with the situation.

¶6. (SBU) A large gathering of youths, who were contained behind barriers, became rowdy at different times during the ceremony. At one point, they could be heard repeatedly shouting "Liberty." When the unionized employees of the electrical company walked by in the parade, the youths started booing. A couple of youths jumped the barriers and were quickly subdued by gendarmes who carried them out of the

way. Twenty to thirty presidential guards (Red Berets) disappeared behind the building where there was a large gathering of youths. The DATT, who was sitting 30 meters away, saw people being hit with rifle butts to get them under control.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Although the celebration passed without significant incident, the internet press has been critical of the event and the president's absence has generated much discussion. Some members of the diplomatic community were nervous while others were frustrated at the disorganization and lack of security. The Russian Defense Attache told the DATT "I'm really just hoping to survive the day." He said that he had to come even though he preferred not to because the Russian mining company, Rusal, had just refurbished one of the GoG's helicopters. The Russian Defense Attache then proceeded to cross his fingers in apparent hope that the helicopter would stay aloft as it flew over the gathered crowd. END COMMENT.

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